

THE SPATIAL EXPERIENCES OF SYRIAN WOMEN LIVING IN GAZİANTEP¹

GAZİANTEP’TE YAŞAYAN SURİYELİ KADINLARIN MEKÂNSAL DENEYİMLERİ

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Abstract

Gaziantep is one of the Turkish cities most highly populated with Syrian refugees living under temporary protection. Factors such as their legal status, relationship with the local authorities, the social environment in which they have settled, social benefits, and working conditions have a huge effect on the refugees’ experiences (Ilcan et al.; 2018: 56). Together with all these variables, the cultural norms and expectations that influence women’s gender roles also shape their spatial experiences (Kalfa et al.; 2009:220). As observed in the field research, women’s experiences can be vastly different depending on their levels of education, knowledge of the language spoken in their new country, and how transient their situation is. This article is based on in-depth interviews made with 15 women, aged between 24 and 48, who mostly come from rural areas surrounding Aleppo. Conducted in Gaziantep’s relatively poorer neighborhoods (İstiklal, 60. Yıl, Güneş, Kıbrıs, and 75. Yıl), the women were asked in Arabic about their experiences as refugees, with the aim of shedding light on women’s experiences of daily life as refugees.

Keywords: Syrian refugee women, spatial experience, Gaziantep

Öz

Gaziantep, geçici koruma kapsamındaki Suriyeli mültecilerin yoğun olarak yaşadığı iller arasındadır. Suriyeli mültecilerin durumlarında yasal statüleri, yerel otoritelerle ilişkileri, yerleştikleri sosyal çevre, yardımlar ve çalışma koşulları gibi faktörler etkili olmaktadır (Ilcan ve diğerleri, 2018:56). Kadınların mekân deneyimlerini bütün bu değişkenlerle birlikte toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinde etkili olan kültürel norm ve beklentiler de şekillendirmektedir (Kalfa ve diğerleri 2009:220). Saha araştırmasında gözlemlendiği gibi kadınların eğitimi, yeni gelinen yerin dilini bilme ve geçicilik durumları, kadınların mekân deneyimlerini oldukça farklılaştırmaktadır. Bu makale çoğunluğu Halep’in kırsalından gelen yaşları 24 ile 48 arasında değişen 15 kadınla yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Görüşmeler Arapça yapılmış olup kadınların mültecilik deneyimlerinin yeni mekânlarda mültecilik durumlarıyla birlikte nasıl yeniden şekillendiği tartışılmaktadır. Saha araştırması Gaziantep’in görece yoksul mahallelerinde (İstiklal, 60. Yıl, Güneş, Kıbrıs ve 75. Yıl) yapılmış olup, kadınların gündelik yaşamlarında mülteciliği nasıl deneyimlediklerinin izi sürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli Kadın Mülteciler, Mekân Deneyimleri, Gaziantep

Immigration to Turkey: Syrian Refugees

Although the flow of immigrants is not a new thing for Turkey, the recent influx has required Turkey to analyze this process using new concepts and instruments. İçduygu and Aksel (2013:169-170) identified four periods³ of immigration to Turkey. They state that the flows of immigration during the 1980s were different in terms of the immigrants’ qualifications and that the volume of these flows were at levels that, to some extent, cannot be

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³ İçduygu and Aksel’s article “*Turkish Migration Politics: A Critical Historical Retrospective*” discusses Turkey’s immigration policy in four different periods with a focus on the *role of the state* and the instruments corresponding to changing immigration relations. The first period spanning from 1923 to the 1950s covers the population exchange and Settlement Law No. 2510 of 1934. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Turkey’s immigration policy was shaped by events including the Labor Recruitment Agreement between Turkey and West Germany, the cease of labor recruitment due to the 1973 oil crisis, and the Law on the Residence and Travel of Foreigners in Turkey (1950). The third period from the 1980s to the 2000s covers the flow of immigrants to Turkey from a range of countries. Finally, the fourth period covers the process that started in the 2000s and reaches into the present day. This period can be summarized as one in which legal instruments have been developed in particular (such as the Law on Foreigners and International Protection) and in which a large number of Syrians are migrating to Turkey (İçduygu and Aksel, 2013:169-170).

compared to those of today. Immigration to Turkey during the 1980s was much more varied in terms of people's country of origin compared with previous ones. During that period of time immigrants came from regions of conflict, such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bulgaria, to settle in certain areas in Turkey. The post-2000s is characterized both by the flow of Syrian immigration to Turkey, which started in March 2011, and the beginning of an attempt to organize the immigration process in general. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection enacted in 2013 introduced the terms *refugee*, *conditional refugee*, *secondary protection* and *temporary protection* without prejudice to previous legal explanations (the geographical restriction, which was stated in the 1951 Geneva Convention and is still valid today). In addition, the Temporary Protection Regulation issued based on the Law on Foreigners and International Protection was prepared in the interest of the Syrian people (in order to avoid punishing them or sending them back for entering the country illegally, etc.). Under the scope of the same law, the Directorate General of Migration Management has opened offices in all Turkish cities and in certain districts.

According to the latest data from the Directorate General of Migration Management, there are currently 3,581,636 Syrians living in Turkey under temporary protection (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020). Turkey is home to the world's highest refugee population, consisting of both Syrians and citizens of other countries (particularly Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran), with a figure approaching almost 4 million. Having said that, about half of the Syrian population under temporary protection lives in the provinces of Gaziantep, Hatay, Istanbul, and Şanlıurfa (UNHCR Turkey, 2018). Such a dense population both has arisen the agreements which are Turkey is a party to and sparked a debate around the concept of "temporariness" created by the temporary protection status, one of the instruments of management that Turkey has developed since 2014. Immigration to Turkey is not a new phenomenon. However, this new wave of immigration will affect Turkey's position in the long run in terms of both the ethnicity and size of its population (İçduygu, Erder, and Gençkaya, 2014:222). Hence, we see that there are ongoing controversies regarding the legal aspect (temporariness/citizenship), economic aspect (unemployment/cheap workforce), and social aspect (integration/social adaptation) of Syrian immigration, as evidenced by many recent studies.

The first controversy fueled by the Syrian refugee issue is that the temporary protection status actually makes Syrians depend on social benefits rather than legally recognizing them. Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel (2017:93) suggest that the temporary protection status introduced by Turkey puts Syrians in a position not a political subject, but rather in need of help which they should be thankful for. Likewise, İçduygu (2015:5) says that the temporary protection regulation deviates from being a legal regulation and creates problems in allowing access to social services, such as education and health, and in working life in particular, as it limits Syrian employment to one specific sector and regulates their spatial mobility. Syrian refugees have not only presented a managerial issue, with the state involved as an influential actor, but have also created an environment of controversy where the impacts are felt in all areas, including employment in particular. The main points of controversy focus on low-wage employment, poor working conditions, precarious environments, and lack of access to municipal services, especially when it comes to problems with regards to working life, as well as the work permits granted to Syrians (Çetin, 2016; Çınar, 2018). Likewise, attracting attention at a local level are those experiences arising from their inclusion in the workforce, use of social networks, and spatial mobility. For example, field studies from 2015 show that there is a population mobility arising from the use of social networks and directed from Turkey's southeastern cities towards larger cities (such as Ankara), due to reasons including job opportunities and overpopulation in the south east (Bakioğlu, Artar and İzmir,

2015: 18). A field study carried out in Gaziantep also showed that one in every five people would like to change their neighborhood or city for various reasons (Gültekin, M.N., Giritlioğlu, İ., Karadaş, Y., Soyudoğan, M., Leyla Kuzu, Ş., Gülhan, S. T., Doğanoglu, M., Utanır A., Aslan, Ç., İncetahtacı, N., 2018:41).

Syrian Refugees in Gaziantep

Syrians under temporary protection status may have spread out across all Turkish cities, but it can be said that they concentrated more around the border cities. For instance, there are 448,891 Syrians in Gaziantep, according to the Directorate General of Migration Management's 2020 data (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020). There are many factors to explain the reasons of those Syrians who have settled in Gaziantep. Among them are its geographical proximity to Syria, the cultural similarities, having relatives there, job opportunities, and having previously visited the city or having some knowledge of the city. The fact that the vast majority of those Syrians who have settled in Gaziantep come from rural areas has helped traditional professions such as dressmaking and shoemaking survive in Gaziantep's workshops. In addition, the pre-war economic dynamism between the two countries, as well as the job opportunities the city has to offer in the fields of agriculture, construction, and manufacturing are also important factors. Syrians continue to contributing to Gaziantep's economy even in the wake of the war. The number of Syrian companies registered to Gaziantep Chamber of Industry⁴ was 1,247 in December 2017, and, according to TEPAV, Gaziantep ranks in the top five for cities with companies established with foreign partner capital (2018:4). Despite all these economic contributions, it is seen that Syrians are often not involved in the labor market, and when they are involved they tend to work off the books, without insurance, and under harsh conditions (İçduygu and Diker, 2017:28; Gültekin et al., 2018; ILO, 2016).

Although the population is more dense in certain neighborhoods, almost every neighborhood in Gaziantep has a Syrian community that has opened small-scale workplaces (such as grocery stores, barbershops, hairdressers, cafés, etc.) to allow them to earn a living. Among the reasons why Syrians have chosen to settle in the city are its low housing or shop rents and its proximity to their relatives or to potential customers. However, Syrians are often seen as the main reason for the difficulties and the high cost of living in the city. Put together by the Ortak Akıl Platformu (Common Sense Platform), Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce's report⁵ entitled "*The Syria Within Us*" states that "Housing rents in all cities with Syrian communities, including Gaziantep in particular, are much higher than the Turkish average" (Gaziantep Common Sense Report-2, 2015:12). In the face of this finding by the City Council, different field studies have revealed that housing and high housing rents are the two things Syrians most complain about or find the most difficult (KADEM, 2015:13; Gültekin et al., 2018:19).

⁴ Gaziantep Chamber of Industry, 2017 Activity Report. <https://www.gto.org.tr/uploads/1553064784-818925.pdf>.

⁵ The report published in 2014 by Gaziantep City Council's Common Sense Platform is entitled "*Problems Related to Syrian Refugees and Suggested Solutions*". Various trade associations, employee associations, Gaziantep-based universities, and the City Council participated in the preparation of the report. The report estimates that there are 200,000 Syrian "guests" in the city and focuses primarily on the issues of security and employment. On the other hand, "*The Syria Within Us*" report published in 2015 by Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce's Common Sense Platform talks about an almost 100% increase in the Syrian population over the time passed and underlines the "*possibility of Syrians staying in Turkey for many years or not returning to their countries*". In addition, it repeats the principle of "*not breaking the labor peace*" ("*Granting Syrians work permits, but revoking the permit when the war comes to an end, ensuring that the number of Syrian workers constitutes a certain portion of the total workers, making sure that they will not make any claims or ask for any compensation when returning to Syria*"). The second report compares the impacts on Gaziantep and its surrounding cities (Adıyaman, Şanlıurfa, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Kilis and Osmaniye) in more detail by looking at the economy, including the tourism sector, and underlines the failure to "integrate Syrians into the city, society, and economy in a reasonable level and manner" due to the population increase. In addition, challenges and economic concerns encountered by border cities both at the regional and national level are expressed. As the title of the second report suggests, it draws attention to the fact that social and cultural life in the city, as well as its economy to some degree, exist side by side without any contact between them. The idea that the local people have priority when it comes to employment and social security in particular is also clearly stated in the second report (Gaziantep City Council [2014] "Report on the Syrian Guests Living in Gaziantep: Problems and Suggested Solutions"; Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce [2015], "*The Syria Within Us*", Gaziantep Common Sense Report-2).

Although our discussion cannot extend to the class differences among Syrians in Gaziantep or how the immigration experience is different for each class, we should still look at how the mutual experiences of low-income Syrians are taking shape in different neighborhoods of Gaziantep. Given that women are in a more disadvantageous position, it is especially important to uncover the factors associated with their experiences in urban spaces. Syrians migrated to Turkey in high numbers between 2013 and 2015 (over 2.5 million in Turkey as a whole) (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020). When we look at Gaziantep based on this data, we see that almost 90% of Syrians arrived in the city before 2015. In terms of how long they have been living in Gaziantep, we see that 40.6% have been living in the city for 3-4 years, while 27.7% have been resident for 5-6 years (Gültekin et al., 2018:8). In light of this data, looking at the issue from a gender perspective while focusing on the spatial experiences of Syrians in Gaziantep appears to be a considerable way to think of the relationship with these “others” in a multi-dimensional manner.

Speaking specifically about refugees, the existence of women in the city is not unconnected with the rhetoric and practices of local management. For example, although in general EU countries have restricting policies for Syrian refugees, some local authorities follow different policies for refugees. The fact that the mayors of the Spanish cities of Barcelona and Madrid pronounced their cities as “welcoming cities” and the arguments underlining the requirement to develop permanent methods to help refugees continue their lives prove that there are different discussions and practices at the local level when it comes to refugees (<https://tr.sputniknews.com/avrupa/201509041017566441/>). For different reasons, Gaziantep Mayor Fatma Şahin, for example, announced that Gaziantep has developed a different immigration model for Syrians. Şahin explains the reason behind the implementation of the “*Gaziantep Immigration Management Model*” both on national and international platforms as follows:

“We explained to our community that ‘It is not a choice but a requirement’. There are things we should do as humans. There is a thing called neighborhood rights. If we closed the borders like some other countries did, perhaps thousands of children would have died by now. That’s why we asked our people to give the maximum amount of support they could in order for us to manage this correctly. We adopted the concept of social integration which we call ‘living together’. Otherwise, this would have led to ghettoization in the city. Enmity would have grown between these groups that had no interaction and this would have fueled racism and radicalism” (Fatma Şahin, Göçü Anlattı, Hürriyet, 24.01.2018).

The perception of Syrians in a city is shaped by many ways, such as the number of relatives living in the city, the density of refugees in the area, whether they speak the same language or not. A field study conducted in 2017 in 26 cities, with a particular focus on border cities (Adana, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep and Mardin) revealed important findings, especially in terms of the development of *social relations* and *rights to work*. For example, Turkish citizens are aware of the Syrian population in their neighborhoods, but are more likely to establish casual relations with them (46.1% chat with Syrians, whereas 14.2% are friends with a Syrian) (Erdoğan, 2018:60). A more recent study carried out in Gaziantep city center also showed a high “satisfaction” rate regarding neighborhood relations (Syrians’ satisfaction with their native neighbors was 64.8%, almost the same as their satisfaction with other Syrians in their neighborhood, which was 64.4%). However, the study did not yield similar rates when it comes to the development and maintenance of these relationships (e.g. going shopping or going for a walk together, which was 11.9%) (Gültekin et al., 2018:54-56). The distance observed in social relations also stands out more when Syrians’ participation in working life is concerned, because Turkish people think that Syrians participation in working life will cause to unemployment of Turkish people. The most crucial concern of Turkish

citizens is that Syrians will have negative effects on the national economy and it is seen that this concern is most prevalent in the border cities (Erdoğan, 2018:69, 74). A field study conducted in Gaziantep's İstiklal neighborhood, which is one of the central neighborhoods where the social aid is offered in large amounts, revealed that Turkish residents held opinions such as that Syrians do not need any social aid, and that they are the ones to blame for the increased rates of unemployment, the elevated costs of housing, and the insecurity of the country. In brief, there are many concerns shaping the relations between the poor and the refugees (Kahraman and Kahya Nizam, 2016:820, 821). Although local policymakers have provided some relief for Syrians under certain obligations, Gaziantep is actually one of the cities that joined the Women Friendly Cities⁶ Project back in 2011. In this sense, it appears to be important to look at the experiences of Syrian women living in Gaziantep in order to understand how the local women of Gaziantep and the Syrian women who have settled in the city in the wake of the war experience urban spaces and how the way they establish a relationship with an area is shaped by the fact that they are woman and that they live under temporary status.

Spatiality and Immigration: *Sharing the Same Table*⁷

In-depth interviews⁸ were conducted with 15 Syrian women aged between 24 and 48 who live in Gaziantep neighborhoods with a dense population of Syrians (İstiklal, 60. Yıl, Güneş Mahallesi, Kıbrıs Mahallesi, and 75. Yıl). The women interviewed are understood to have come from the provincial and rural areas of Aleppo – a portrayal that matches the Syrian profile in Gaziantep. During the interviews we first focused on their experiences of immigration and then their spatial experiences associated with immigration, including the changes to their households and the social relations in their neighborhoods. To this end, we ensured that the interviews conducted using the purposive sampling method included Syrian women who had spent a certain amount of time in Gaziantep.

The discussion section of the article focuses on the daily lives of Syrian women living in Gaziantep under temporary protection and their positions in their household, their temporary status, as well as whether they benefit from municipal services or have a say in determining such services, and whether the services are accessible, and it further addresses the factors shaping the establishment of a relationship with urban areas. Considering the profile of Syrian women living in Gaziantep, we see that there are many factors including age, educational background, family profile, and employment status that determine the use of municipal services to vary from one woman to another. In addition, women's spatial experiences are especially shaped by the fact that they are *the others* in terms of ethnicity or being Syrian. When the services and opportunities offered by the city is considered, it is without doubt that the most disadvantageous part of the women population in the city is refugee women. Jacobs (2019:169) reminds us that the field studies, especially those with a focus on immigrant groups, should take into account the *socio-demographic disparities* among immigrants in addition to the *ethnic disparities*. Likewise, Oğuz (2016:160) suggests that class differences, individual differences, as well as low levels of income and education are determinant in the spatial experiences of women who live in cities that turn a blind eye to gender equality. Yet, women are not always in a secondary position or one that is pre-

⁶ Initiated in 2006, Gaziantep joined the second phase of the *Women Friendly Cities* Project. Among the objectives of the project are ensuring that all city dwellers benefit equally from all the opportunities that the city has to offer and that people are able to participate equally in the planning of municipal services and the related decision-making processes (<http://www.kadindostukentler.com/kdk-kadin-dostu-kent.php>).

⁷ This was an expression used by a Syrian woman called Münire when she was interviewed during the field research. She used this expression when referring to the most common remarks she hears in her neighborhood, such as "They live off benefits". During the interview Münire said that Syrians are, as opposed to popular belief, actually working and earning a living through own efforts rather than relying on benefits, and asked "Why do they treat us like this? It's not like we've sat down at their dinner tables" – a question that reveals that she is trying to understand or deal with the labelling she has faced in her neighborhood (Goffman, 2014).

⁸ The in-depth interviews were conducted in Arabic in March and April 2018.

determined. Women are sometimes in a position to be able to negotiate their situations or develop relevant tactics.

Before focusing on the spatial experiences of Syrian women, we must examine the way in which local women experience Gaziantep city center, its municipal services, and its urban spaces. To this end, we need to address how and through what the difference between being a “citizen” and a “temporary status holder”, or how being a local Gaziantep woman and a Syrian woman affects the relationships established with a space. Data from a field study conducted in Gaziantep city center⁹ provides an important input that allows us to focus on the spatial experiences of local women. The study provides data with regards to how women use urban spaces, what their considerations of urban spaces, how they travel within the city, and how much they benefit from municipal services, or if they are aware of such services. The research shows that the majority of the women (32.5%) go out once a month or not at all, while 16.3% never go out. 28.5% of the women said that they go out a few times a week, while 23% said that they only go out once a week. The most frequently visited urban spaces are bazaars (45.2%), supermarkets (43.8%), and parks (42.7%) (Sipahi and Özsoy, 2015:166-167).

Interviews with Syrian women revealed that they experience the neighborhoods where they live to the extent required by daily needs (shopping at the supermarket, taking their children to and from school, or taking them to immigration health centers, etc.) and that they feel or are now required to feel a higher sense of belonging in their neighborhoods compared to their early years in the city. As the neighborhoods where these interviews were conducted have high levels of poverty, the local population regard refugees more in terms of economic concerns rather than a willingness to make friends. Bauman suggests that vulnerable groups are less welcoming to foreigners as the latter increase uncertainty and competitiveness in the area (Bauman, 2018:11). In parallel with this suggestion, there is a common assumption in Turkey that Syrians access municipal services more easily and that they cause an increase in poverty, in unemployment, and in rent levels. There are also questions frequently asked as to why they do not return back to Syria. Besides this, many citizenship do not define Syrians as “foreigners”, but as “war victims”, “economic burdens”, or “dangerous people” (Erdoğan, 2018:55). *Temporariness* often tangibly manifests itself as a way for Syrian women to deal with the inequalities they face, or more often shows itself in their relations with the others (although dominance is not directly visible) (Scott, 2004). Fatma, one of the Syrian women interviewed, came to Gaziantep from a rural area near to Aleppo. She said that she has struggled to get used to the city life in Gaziantep, in particular to live in an apartment. Before coming to Gaziantep, Fatma and her family earned a living through farming¹⁰. As a mother of 11, she now lives with six of her children and her husband. Fatma has gone through a brief insight into her current situation by giving an example of life in Gaziantep. She stated that as this is not their “native country” she “chooses to remain silent” at times, for example, when her children experience a problem with others while playing out in the park.

Twenty-eight years old Münire, mother of four children, shares the same neighborhood with almost all her relatives. She told us that they generally have limited interactions with their neighbors since there is a general tendency in her neighborhood towards them by saying things like “Syrians are dirty. I don’t want them to come over to my place and I don’t want to go to their place either”. Besides this, she also stated that the real

⁹ The research was conducted in Gaziantep’s central districts of Şahinbey, Şehitkamil, and Oğuzeli. Field research based on a survey conducted with a total of 1,004 women over the age of 18 live in 59 different neighborhoods.

¹⁰ Fatma explained that they were engaged in agriculture and had a spacious house outside Aleppo. She now finds it hard living in an apartment in Gaziantep and for that reason mostly wants to spend her time in the park next to their building. She tells that in summer time they use the park more often so as to not to cause any noise in the building. However, since she has to share the park with locals, it is always her children who were accused of being wrongdoing whenever a problem arises between the children, as she explains.

problem is not the neighborhood or the neighbors, but the children. Münire expresses this conflicting situation as follows: “Our neighbors are good, the grocery store owner is good, but the children... the children are not. Just yesterday, there were boys aged 13 or 14 on the street who said that they knew why we came here [boys are implying some sexual reasons].” “It’s not like we’ve sat down at their dinner tables,” says Münire expressing how surprised she was. This very example indicates the multi-dimensional encountering between the local and the foreigner. Studies conducted in the central districts of Gaziantep show that women are much more afraid of harassment or rape (48.1%) than becoming victims of theft or other crimes (Sipahi and Özsoy, 2015:211). However, it is obvious that the rate of the situations that the refugee women face, related to sexuality in their daily lives, is more often.

It was seen that the Syrian women interviewed in Gaziantep generally have relatives living in the same neighborhoods, even if there are no relatives, there are other Syrian families living close to them. Although it is thought that relations with neighbors or relatives provide women with a certain level of convenience in mobility, Syrian women appear to use urban spaces in a limited way. The in-depth interviews revealed that women go to the district bazaar, immigration health centers, hospitals or further shopping areas together with their husbands, relatives, or neighbors. We can say that the closest neighborhood grocery stores seems to be the only places where the Syrian women can go to on their own. The Syrian women interviewed consider the sunset as a point of reference. Indeed, neither they nor their daughters choose to go out after the sun goes down. In her study of “*Gender and Power*”, Connell defines streets as “areas under the occupation of men”(1998:181). Likewise, streets (conceptualised as *outside* during the interviews with women) were also defined during the interviews as male dominated areas. Indeed, the streets are rarely used by women after it gets dark outside. Delal, one of the interviewees who is a 45-years-old mother of four, sheds a clear light on the use of streets: “Girls are very important to us. She [her daughter] never goes out alone. I do though, because I’m old. I need to do so in order to buy things for the house.” Those who stated that they have relatives in the city stand at 79%, according to the field research in Gaziantep. And, most of the women interviewed experience urban spaces (parks, malls, and district bazaar, etc.) not on their own but with their husbands, sisters, women neighbors, or with their children. In addition, household profiles show that the number of children in a household varies from 2 to 11 (Gültekin et al.; 2018:11,14). A review of household income data indicates that men and boys generally work in jobs that are paid weekly. Syrian women, on the other hand, are generally busy with the traditional tasks of a housewife, as was the case in Syria. As suggested by Buz, women’s spatial experiences are affected by the dynamics behind the migration to another country and the traditional structure of their country of origin (Buz, 2009:320).

Municipal Services and the Existence of Syrian Women in the City

Not being able to speak Turkish is the main problem encountered by Syrian women during their use of urban spaces or in their first years as immigrants. Apart from Arabic, it was seen both during the interviews and in daily life that Syrian women were able to speak other languages spoken in the region, but that lack of Turkish is still among the issues most frequently expressed by women in addition to facing up some economic problems. Women’s spatial experiences are affected by household structures, the reasons behind their migration, their ages, educational levels or class differences, and their language proficiencies. It should be noted that Syrian women who have a profession and come from upper-middle class families in particular have very different spatial experiences. For example, it seems that upper-middle class Syrian women are able to access public spaces more easily than they did in Syria. However, the women interviewed in this study came from rural areas of Syria and some of them have completed only the compulsory education in Syria. In addition, almost

none of the interviewees had been working in an income-generating job while living in Syria. Interviews also revealed that having a waged-work is not seen as a positive entity by some of them. Thus, women had to deal with something new to them when their families were economically shaken due to their displacement. Getting a job can be seen as a solution in such situations. However, sometimes being involved in waged-work becomes an obstacle for women, especially if they are getting paid on a piecework basis. Working from home may look appealing for Syrian women who have no experience of working outside the home, however, not only spending long hours on the job, earning very low amounts of money but also difficulties in maintaining social relations in new environments are the multi-dimensional problems for Syrian women.

Ünlütürk Ulutaş and Akbaş (2018:284-285) state that there are differences between certain cities with regards to the pre-war workforce participation rates of Syrian women. It is seen that upper-middle class Syrian women were mostly working in the service sector prior to the war. However, the war led to a decline in women employment in all areas (agriculture, etc.), including the service sector in particular. Yet, in general terms, it is seen that women's positions in Syria are determined by traditional gender roles and that women mainly take care of the house and the children. Indeed, during the interviews all the Syrian women stated that they had a more comfortable life back in Syria and were not concerned about making a living. Ayşe, one of the Syrians interviewed, told that she moved to Turkey with her children after losing her husband in the war and that she finds it hard to provide for her family: "When I first came to Turkey, I relied on the charity from an association for orphans and widows for a year and a half. One of my daughters is married and lives in Kilis. Before that I was on benefits. I have seven children. My sons work for weekly wages in Cumhuriyet and İstiklal... It is very difficult to earn a living in Turkey."

Women's negative attitudes towards working are a common phenomenon in cases where traditionally the man is responsible for providing for the family, while woman is responsible for the housework. Yet, even in jobs suited for gender specific roles (e.g. working on a piecework basis) this negative attitude comes to light when such jobs do not lead to any positive change. Sons are the first members of a household who are expected to contribute to the budget at times when the family is economically shaken due to reasons such as immigration. Generally, daughters and the adult females are the last members of the family who are expected to provide income for the family. Indeed, many field studies show that men are the ones who generate income for the household. When asked if she was working in Gaziantep, Münire answered: "Luckily, I'm not." However, she gave some examples of her family's experiences to show how difficult it was to earn a living in Gaziantep. She stated that her husband is a tailor and works at his uncle's workshop for 350 TL a week, and that her younger son has also begun to work for a weekly wage as father's income was not enough to provide for the family.

Hatice, another Syrian woman interviewed, is a 24-years-old mother who is now expecting her second child and lives in the same house with her sister-in-law. She also shares the house with her husband's family who lives downstairs with their unmarried children. Hatice explained that she, together with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, have been working on piecework basis since they moved to Gaziantep. Hatice, who did not work back in Syria, stated that since she began working in Gaziantep nothing changed in her life, except for the fact that she works more than ever now. Hatice reflects this situation as follows:

"I spend the money I earn on doctors and on my children. Actually there has been nothing new in my life. I live here with my sister-in-law. My mother-in-law does not allow me and my husband to get our own place. She believes that we wouldn't take care of her anymore if we moved out. She thinks that her current situation would change for the worse.

For the last two months I haven't been able to make a spare time to go and visit my mum due to this job... We had to stay up late until 1 a.m. yesterday to finish the orders.”

Working on a piecework basis from home, Hatice says that she works for long hours and that she does not have any interactions with her neighbors, though she blames not being able to speak any Turkish for this. “I never see my neighbors. How would I be able to meet up with them anyway? I don't speak Turkish”. Not knowing the language of the new place where they have settled creates a significant obstacle on the way towards accessing municipal services and engaging in the urban dynamism, especially in the first years of immigration. Indeed, the women interviewed revealed that their daily needs, from paying the bills to going to the hospital, are either handled by or together with their husbands or sons. Some of the interviewees told that they cannot take the bus as they do not speak the language, while some explained that they choose to walk due to the fact that they are uncomfortable with people staring at them. An examination into the research focusing on the daily lives of Syrian women shows that, although it is thought that the Syrians socialize among themselves, one in every five Syrians does not engage in almost any communication (İNGEV and IPSOS, 2017:4). The field study with a focus on Syrians living in Gaziantep also suggests that women are less capable of using the language (Turkish) than men, and that the courses provided by the metropolitan or district municipalities as part of municipal services are not attended (92% do not attend any course)¹¹ (Gültekin et al., 2018:46-47). Although there are various NGOs and local management bodies in Gaziantep that organize free language classes for Syrian women at certain intervals, the women interviewed had low language class participation rates for various reasons (having a disability, having children of pre-school age, etc.).

It is seen that factors such as language, as well as the male-dominated values that restrain women within the role of housewives, restrict their access to municipal services and urban spaces. One of the women interviewed uttered the following sentences to express how stressful it is to be not able to speak the language: “I don't speak the language. I feel embarrassed to talk. My children are with me. I usually walk as I don't really know where to get the bus from or which route it will take. I walk even if it's really far.”

In light of her field research, Alkan lists the factors affecting women's mobility in the city as follows: public transport, being a pedestrian, and transportation fees (Alkan,2005: 120-121). In addition to Alkan's findings, a focus on the experiences of refugee women shows us that the lack of knowledge of the language spoken in their new country in particular and the local perceptions of refugees negatively affect women's access to municipal services in particular. Some of the Syrian women interviewed do not use public transport for financial reasons, whereas some often choose to walk, together with their children, due to people's attitudes towards Syrians. As suggested by Erdoğan (2018:124-217), the locals' perception of Syrians and the fact that social relations are generally weak are among the important topics of discussion when it comes to being an immigrant/refugee in Turkey.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of immigration is a dynamic process that is affected by various aspects, from individuals' household patterns to their family relations. When we include women in particular into the scope of the research, we see that the characteristics of the new country and the structure of the country of origin significantly affect women's experiences of immigration, as suggested by Buz (2009). From this perspective, immigration leads to a process that reshapes or re-discusses gender-specific roles and, accordingly, what is expected

¹¹ Likewise, research conducted in the central districts of Gaziantep revealed that 85% of Gaziantep women are not aware of such services and that only 13.4% benefit from various services. Not being aware of municipal services and having conservative patterns are listed in the research as the reasons that limit the number of women benefiting from municipal services, hence the low participation (Sipahi and Özsoy, 2015:176, 177).

from women. Among the factors that affect a woman's experience of immigration are her access to municipal services, and her relationships, gender-specific roles, her educational background, age, whether she has worked before, her level of language proficiency, and changes in family structure due to immigration. The legal legislation, municipal services, and attitudes towards immigrants/refugees in particular in the host country also affect women's mobility and perceptions of immigration. Experiences of a Syrian woman are sometimes synonymous with temporariness, while at other times it is totally associated with gendered structure of the society. Taking a closer look at Gaziantep, we can say that in just a few years the city has witnessed the settlement of a dense population of Syrians who have sometimes managed to find employment in different sectors or to establish their own businesses. However, issues such as unemployment and low wage policies make up the main debates that will be discussed in the long run. Women's spatial experiences are seen to be particularly altered by men's changing positions (whether the man is the one person working family or not), their level of language proficiency, and the characteristic differences between the host city and the country of origin, as well as by the fact that young sons in households are joining the workforce and women have to work in some cases. In order to increase the urban participation of less educated Syrian women, it is necessary to diversify municipal services and to discuss ways of increasing participation in the design process of such services.

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